

DEVOTIONAL AID FOR 5 OCTOBER 2020 – 11 OCTOBER 2020



**UPPER
HUNTER**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Dear church family,

What is the gospel? I sometimes say it with just five words: God saves sinners through Christ. Another very good summary I heard only needs three words: Adoption through propitiation. Okay, maybe that needs some unpacking, but that's for another time.

The Apostle Paul insists that there is only one gospel, the gospel of Christ. (Gal 1:6–7) This one true gospel, however, can be explained in numerous ways. In fact, the Bible itself presents us that one true gospel with many word pictures and explanations. Sometimes it is a deliverance from bondage. Sometimes it is forgiveness of sins and wrong doings. Sometimes it is a rescue from destruction. And there are many others.

Not only the one true gospel can be explained in many ways, but the gospel itself has many aspects for us to learn. One crucial aspect of the gospel can be said with four words: justification by faith alone. Right. Let me unpack that a bit.

In Christian theology, justification has to do with our acceptance before God. In a nutshell, we are asking the question, how can we stand righteous before the holy God so He may receive us into the eternal life? And to this question, the bible's answer is that we are justified by faith alone, that is, we stand righteous before the holy God only because we trust (have faith in) Christ who is our righteousness. (Rom 4:5; Gal 2:16, etc) So it is not our own works or good moral life that make us stand righteous before God, but it is only Christ's righteousness that makes us stand righteous before God. And we receive Christ's righteousness through faith alone, not faith plus works.

This is indeed the heart of the gospel, because without understanding and believing that God justifies the ungodly, we will forever attempt to prove our perfect righteousness but never successfully. And in the end, we will be left with our own efforts that will be never good enough for God, because only Christ's perfect righteousness is good enough for the holy God. But praise God for His mercy and grace, for this is exactly what He offers us, Christ's perfect righteousness becomes ours through faith alone.

This week, we spend time thinking and meditating on this wonderful truth, and I hope this enlarges your heart for God, seeing how merciful He has been to us.

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Lee

<https://www.upperhunterpc.com>

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM¹

Lord's Day 23

Q59) What good does it do you, however, to believe all this?

A) In Christ I am right with God and heir to life everlasting.

Q60) How are you right with God?

A) Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart.

Q61) Why do you say that by faith alone you are right with God?

B) It is not because of any value my faith has that God is pleased with me. Only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me right with God. And I can receive this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than by faith alone.

ROMANS 4:5

However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

If there were one major mistake people have about Christianity, it would be that Christianity is just like any other religion telling people: be a good person and god(s) will love you. This could not be further from truth. Christianity or the Christian gospel is not "be good and you will go to heaven" or even "try harder so at least God can see your efforts and accept you". Not at all. The Bible's message is that we are all sinners without exception so we all deserve God's condemnation, but God has provided the righteousness we need by sending His own Son, Jesus Christ. All other religions require some kind of "righteousness" from their believers, but none of them offers righteousness like God of the Bible does. Christ is our righteousness. Not me, not my family, not my Christian upbringing, not my regular church attendance, nothing of my own. As August Toplady wrote: "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling;" That is the Christian faith.

GALATIANS 2:15–16

We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

The great controversy in the early church was whether the gentiles (non-Jewish people) could be saved without observing the Old Testament, effectively becoming Jews themselves. The Holy Spirit revealed to the Apostles that the gentiles did not need to observe the Old Testament like Jews because Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. But this was not in contrast the Old Testament itself actually, as if the Jews could be saved by obeying the Old Testament laws while the gentiles do not need to. As the Apostle Paul makes it clear in Galatians 2:15-15, Jews as well as the gentiles are justified (saved) by faith in Jesus Christ. It is Christ alone we need, no matter who we are. The worst sinner only needs Christ to be saved and the most morally upright man still needs Christ to be saved.

¹ The text of the Catechism is usually from <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism/>, but time to time, for the sake of clarity, I have also adopted the translation used in *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung.